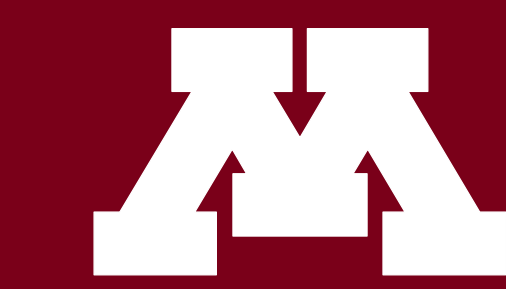


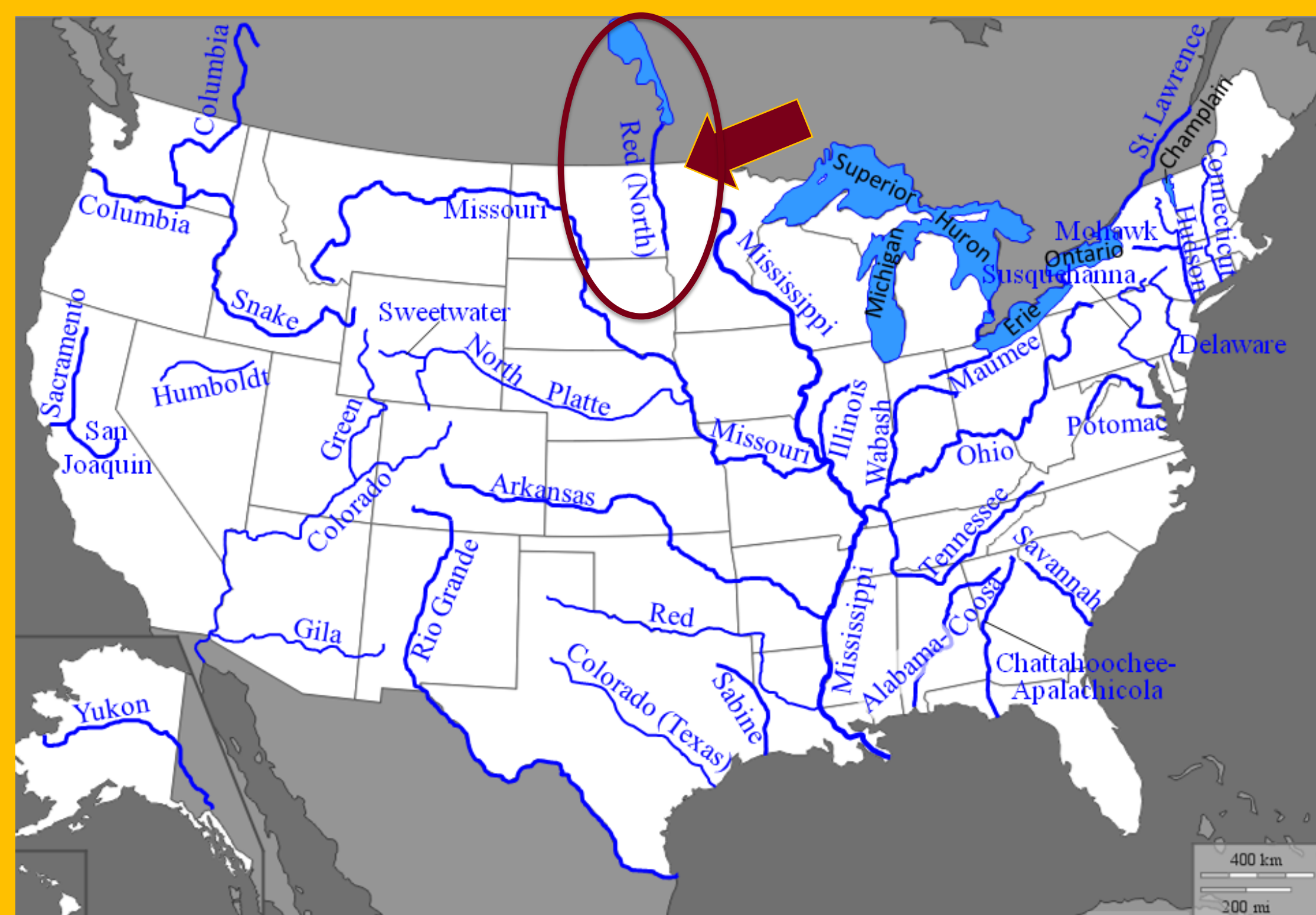
One Message, Many Voices: Inter-Disciplinary Partnerships for Resilience Communication

Ellie McCann & Sara Croymans, Extension Educators



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

Flooding in the Red River Valley



The Red River dividing North Dakota and Minnesota flows to the north out of the United States into Canada. More disaster declarations have been made for the Red River Valley than any other section of the US. The past two decades have reflected a wet climatic cycle in the Red River Valley, causing 20 consecutive annual floods, compared to 29 floods in the preceding 90 years.

Then in 2009, the Fargo, ND and Moorhead, MN area was again faced a with potentially catastrophic record flood.

- Flooding persisted for 60 days, including 32 days in “major flood stage” of over 9.14 meters.
- The river crested at 12.45 meters, the highest water level ever recorded, causing considerable worry as to whether the sandbag dikes could create barriers high enough to outpace the river’s rise.
- Two separate flood crests occurred 19 days apart, maintaining a constant state of tension regarding whether the sandbag fortifications would hold throughout this protracted period.

Repeated exposure to flooding risk increases the stress of people living in the flood plain. Minimizing disaster impact is a responsibility of civic leadership. During the 2009 flood, a crucial aspect was the transparent planning and execution of the disaster response through daily televised meetings, including a focus on mental health.

Establishment of Red River Resilience

Red River Resilience (RRR) formed in the wake of the 2009 flood to heal the community psyche. Members represented volunteer disaster response organizations, spiritual care and ministry, public health, area colleges, medical and mental health facilities, and county social services. With intentional inter-disciplinary cooperation, RRR pursued its mission of ‘promoting recovery of health, mental health and spiritual wellbeing for persons living in the disaster-affected area’.

RRR promotes resilience by incorporating psychosocial aspects of community activation and mutual support paired with flexible civic leadership, community-wide involvement of mitigation efforts, frequently updated organizational linkages that enhance access to disaster resources, and sustained psychosocial support before, during, and after the crisis. It is an organization intentional about efficiency with clear objectives and follow-up.

One Message – Resilience

The RRR’s message focuses on resilience which involves the:

- ability to "bounce back" & recover from difficult experiences
- capacity to withstand adversity
- capacity to sustain emotional & physical well being in the face of challenging events

Foster hope

- Focus on the positive
- Have confidence in yourself
- Put things in perspective

Act with purpose

- Make a plan
- Move toward goals
- Engage in active coping

Connect with others

- Maintain relationships
- Give and receive help
- Spend time with others

Take care of yourself

- Take time to relax
- Take care of your body
- Nurture your spirituality

Search for meaning

- Find positive meaning
- Learn about yourself
- Look for personal growth

Implementation & Evaluation

Study 1 -

A qualitative study was conducted with two small towns affected by the 1997 flood of the Red River, both with strong civic leadership and extensive citizen involvement in flood mitigation during the flood fight. Eight years after the flood, 15 former civic leaders from each town were interviewed regarding what advice they might offer on principles of psychological resilience. Five categories captured the majority of recommended actions which support the resilience strategies incorporated in the FACTS message.

Study 2 –

After another significant flood threat in 2011 a study was conducted to examine the applicability of the resilience message. The study surveyed community volunteers to assess the frequency with which the respondents had used the fifteen specific resilience strategies that are part of the FACTS message, while mitigating the current disaster. Ratings indicated frequent use of almost all resilience strategies, which support the acceptance of the FACTS of resilience as applicable for coping with disaster-related stress.

Many Voices

The resilience message was delivered in a variety of ways:

- Multi-language materials
- Day of Resilience
- Local university YouTube video
- Local pastor’s sermons
- Telephone call in session
- Webinars



New Voices

The resilience message has been used with a variety of audiences experiencing various stressors:

- Military families
- Homeless persons
- Children impacted by disaster
- Families in crisis
- Included in “Recovery After Disaster: The Family Financial Toolkit”